

ENGLISH VERSION

The Government is searching a solution for the Police funding

Raúl Maldonado said he will meet with the Police and the Board to overcome differences in funds management

Friday, December 28, 2018 - 11:23 AM

By [Ricardo Cortés Chico](#)



(GFR Media)

The Department of the Interior, the Police Department and experts from the Oversight Board will meet over the next two weeks to try to dispel, once and for all, insufficient funding in the Puerto Rico Police, said Raúl Maldonado Gautier, chief financial officer of the government.

Despite court orders and previous meetings on budgetary matters with the Board, the Police still claims that they have no funds to pay the salaries of cadets once they graduate and join the ranks of the Puerto Rico Police.

The controversy is full of a number of inaccuracies. On one hand, the Puerto Rico Police has not detailed how many cadets they will recruit for the new round of introductory trainings. This academy, which will begin in February at the Police facilities in Gurabo, seeks to tackle – as part of the reform process – part of the officers shortage estimated since 2013.

The Police Department did not offer an estimate of recurrent funds they would need to cover additional payroll expenses once these agents joined the ranks.

On the other hand, the Board has been insisting that the Police has the funds necessary to cover these payroll expenses and argued that the Department can make changes in its budget structure. However, the Board, created through PROMESA, has not determined what parts of the budget the Police can change.

In short, the Puerto Rico Police has not specified how much money they need and the Board has not said clearly where they can get it from.

In an interview with **El Nuevo Día**, Maldonado Gautier said that he recommends to hold a meeting with members of the Police next week. Then (in mid-January) to meet with the Board to see where the obstacle is and what can be done.

He also added that according to the Board there are enough funds but the Police say otherwise. “We are going to see the numbers. I think there are some accounts with little flexibility that could be used. We need to make a decision right now,” said Maldonado.

For example, the official said that there are some items assigned for the purchase of equipment that could be redirected to cover the payroll until they find a permanent solution to the issue.

We need to see if we have such flexibility to move funds internally. To do so, we need both parties sitting at the table speaking the same language,” stressed Maldonado Gautier.

Judge Laura Taylor Swain, who handles bankruptcy cases under Promesa Title III, decided to limit the government's ability to reallocate budget items.

The determination comes as part of the government’s objection to the budget imposed by the Board for the current fiscal year, which ends on June 30, 2019.

This judicial decision, which significantly limited the government's framework of action in budgetary matters, was taken by Ricardo Rosselló Nevares administration before the US Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in Boston, Massachusetts.

According to the Board's website, the Police has made nine requests to change items in the budget. Of that total, two were withdrawn by the government, one was rejected and the other six were approved by the Board.

In total, the Board has approved budget reallocations for \$ 55.1 million.

Among the changes there is a \$9.5 million allocation to buy 209 patrol cars at a cost of \$45,453 each. There is also a request of about \$38.9 million to cover Police payroll for May and June 2018.

PUBLICIDAD

Earlier this month, the Board authorized a \$499,221 increase in the Firefighters Corps budget to cover the salary of about 41 firefighters in temporary positions. Those funds came from the Police payroll to the Firefighters.

At the end of October, federal judge Gustavo Gelpí ordered the Police and the Board to take the necessary actions to address the fiscal needs of the Police reform. Since 2012, Gelpí has presided over the civil rights violation case against the Police, which led to the forced Police reform.

A V2A report on the reform process concluded that the Puerto Rico Police requires, at least, 11,680 police officers on the streets, which last April –when the report was published–, represent an 11 percent increase of active officers. 18 years ago, the Police had almost 20,000 officers.

In addition to resizing the Police to the island's needs, a good part of the initiatives of the Police reform seek to retrain the officers in the use of force, searches and raids, civil rights, anti-discrimination policies, technology and information systems, among other issues.